

Monarch Nectar Plants Through the Seasons

The plight in the iconic Monarch has stimulated a groundswell of interest in pollinators, particularly here in the Midwest, where the fate of the Monarch will be determined. Restoring a variety of nectar sources is just as important as increasing the amount of milkweed available as larval food plants. By planting a variety of species that flower from late spring through the fall migration, we can insure Monarchs and other declining pollinators have a fighting chance to recover their former abundance.

Late spring and early summer signals the arrival the new generation of Monarchs here in the Midwest. Composites such as Lance-Leaf Coreopsis (*Coreopsis lanceolata*), Black-Eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*), Pale Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea pallida*) are some of the best early season nectar sources. Butterflyweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) and Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) start to flower in June, providing Monarchs with nectar and larval food.

As the season progresses into mid-summer, the number of nectar sources increases with each new and larger generation of Monarchs. Mints such as Bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*), Mountain Mint (*Pycnanthemum virginianum*) and Hyssops (*Agastache spp*) come into flower. Rattlesnake Master (*Eryngium yuccifolium*), an odd member of the carrot family, is exceptionally attractive to pollinators. An explosion of composites comes into bloom in mid-summer, including False Sunflower (*Heliopsis helianthoides*), Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*), Yellow Coneflower (*Ratibida pinnata*), Plains Coreopsis (*Coreopsis palmata*), Dense and Prairie Blazing Star (*Liatris spicata* and *pycnostachya*), Rosinweed (*Silphium integrifolium*), Cupplant (*Silphium perfoliatum*), Prairie Dock (*Silphium terebinthinaceum*) and Compassplant (*Silphium laciniatum*). Common milkweed continues to bloom into mid-summer while Swamp Milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*) peaks at this time.

Late summer and early fall is a critical time for Monarchs. Their population peaks at this time, requiring abundant nectar to fuel their fall migration. Fortunately, our native flora rises to the occasion with an abundance of nectar sources. Sweet and Showy Black-Eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia subtomentosa* and *fulgida* var. *speciosa*) bloom from late July to early September. The brilliant purple flowers of Smooth and Tall Ironweed (*Vernonia fasciculata* and *altissima*) peak in August. Hollow, Spotted and Sweet Joe-Pye Weed (*Eupatorium fistulosum*, *maculatum*, and *purpureum*) are real favorites of Monarch butterflies in August and early September. The late season Rough and Savanna Blazing Stars (*Liatris aspera* and *scariosa* var. *nieuwlandii*) are also favorites of Monarchs in August through the middle of September.

September brings the largest fuel source for the Monarch migration in the form of Asters and Goldenrods. While Monarchs will nectar on the ubiquitous roadside Canada Goldenrod, the flat-topped species such as Grass-leaved Goldenrod (*Solidago graminifolia*), Riddell's Goldenrod (*Solidago riddelli*), and Stiff Goldenrod (*Solidago rigida*) seem to be more attractive. Among the asters Sky-blue Aster (*Aster oolentangensis*), Smooth Aster (*Aster laevis*), and Swamp Aster (*Aster puniceus*) are just a few of the species that are excellent nectar sources. Perhaps the single most important nectar source in much of the Midwest during the Monarch migration is the beautiful deep purple New England Aster (*Aster novae-angliae*). Monarchs flock to its flowers in mid to late September as they exit the Midwest.

Plant Feature: Savanna Blazing Star (*Liatris scariosa* var. *nieuwlandii*)

This showy variety is native to the southern Great Lakes states where it is typically found on well-drained soils derived from sand and gravel outwash. It has large well-spaced florets on long pedicels with peak bloom occurring from mid-August until mid-September. The plant typically grows 2-3 feet in height, sometime branching at the base. The flowers are bright reddish purple and intensely attractive to Monarchs. In cultivation, it should be grown in sun or dappled shade in well-drained soil. In a prairie restoration, it should be used in well-drained soils with associates from our [low stature prairie mix](#).

